

Priest gets jail time for abusing disabled man

■ Molester apologizes before the judge for the "terrible damage I feel I have done."

BY STAFF WRITER

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BATH — A priest who admitted sexually assaulting a mentally disabled man apologized yesterday for the "terrible damage I feel I have done" and was sentenced to six months in the Steuben County Jail.

The Rev. Eugene G. Emo, 61, showed little surprise as the sentence was pronounced, even though he had asked the court for "leniency and forgiveness" for his crime.

District Attorney John Tunney, who has said the six-month sentence was part of a plea-bargain the priest agreed to in February, yesterday said he had no comment on the case.

Emo, who pleaded guilty to one felony count of first-degree sexual assault, faced up to seven years in state prison if he had gone to trial and been found guilty.

Emo, at one time a priest at St. Januarius Church in Naples and a former chaplain at the Canandaigua Department of Veterans Affairs hospital, said yesterday before his sentencing that he accepted "full responsibility" for engaging in sexual activity with a 33-year-old disabled man over a period of several years.

Before he was sentenced yesterday, he told Judge Donald Purple that he had undergone therapy since his arrest and that he realized for the first time in his life that he was "dealing with an addiction."

After Emo's arrest, numer-

ous complaints were lodged by former altar boys and other male members of parishes where he had served, but no additional charges were filed because of the statute of limitations on the cases.

Reading from a prepared statement, the priest apologized for acts he said "led to damage to the health and welfare" of his victim, for "violation of my public trust" and because he "injured the reputations of co-workers in the ministry."

Emo's lawyer, Felix Lapine of Rochester, read a letter to the court from a former priest who went into the seminary with Emo when both men were 14 and who blamed Emo's problems on years of sexual repression demanded by the church of those who enter the priesthood.

Outside the courtroom, Lapine said that Bishop Matthew Clark of the Rochester Diocese had refused to write a letter to the court supportive of Emo.

The victim appeared briefly in the courtroom yesterday but didn't speak to the court.

Emo violated both the trust of congregations who looked up to him for guidance and the diocese that "gave you a leave of absence to try to correct your problem and you continued to violate that trust," Purple said.

A member of St. Januarius Church, who asked not to be identified, said he had mixed emotions about Emo's sentence.

"What he did was a crime, and I think that jail time is appropriate," said one parishioner. "No one in the church is very happy about what he did to us, but I'm just going to continue to pray for the man." □



Emo